

TOWN OF BELT
70 CASTNER STREET
PO BOX 453
BELT, MONTANA 59412
Phone (406) 277-3621
bch@3rivers.net

Mayor: John Masonovich Clerk-Treasurer: Jean Fontana

9/10/2012

To Whom It May Concern:

We the undersigned council of the Town of Belt, Montana would like to take this opportunity to address a few of the concerns that are currently facing the Town of Belt.

Belt, was originally a coal mining community. The first coal mining claims were staked in Belt, in 1877. In 1891, the Anaconda Mining Company purchased the majority of claims. In 1877 the Castner Coal and Coke Company (a partnership formed by P.J. Shields and Marcus Daly) operated in Belt which was a thriving coal mining community until early 1895 when the ACM merged with the Castner Coal and Coke Co. In July of 1895, the ACM laid off over 500 miners without any warning leaving 1,000 workers to meet the demands of 2,000 tons of coal per day. By 1904 the mining boom was over for Belt, mining however continued until the East Belt Coal Mine shut down in 1963 due to lack of high grade coal and customers for their product, at that time the mines were filling with water and the cost of pumping was too high.

Today, Belt is left with the results of those years of being a thriving coal mining community. Our creek is polluted with mine wastes that spew forth their toxic waste, the banks of Belt Creek, are orange with sludge. What was once a blue ribbon stream, is now a toxic waste dump for mine water. Numerous studies have been conducted of the creek to study the contents of the mine waste, other studies to determine how to clean up or contain the acid mine drainage, but, to date no actual clean up efforts have been made to clear up the problem.

One of our other problems is our aging and leaking water tank, this tank was built in 1938. Our main water tank is concrete, and the concrete is deteriorating severely. We feel this represents a potential health risk, we do however have a second smaller steel tank that was built in 1959, it has patched holes and also is in need of repair. We have applied for funds from DNRC a grant in the amount of \$100,000, which was awarded in May of 2011, a grant to CDBG in the amount of \$228,000 and a SRF loan in the amount of \$192,000. We previously applied for a TSEP grant in the amount of \$500,000 which we did not receive. The town has scaled back our original project, and broke it into phases. Phase one would be to replace the existing concrete tank and repair the steel tank. A later phase would be to install water meters.

The DOC water utility target rate on residential dwelling unit for Belt is \$29.71 the Town has implemented incremental increases in the water rate, our current rate for water is \$31.80 per month, which is above the target rate. In June of 2012, the town replaced one of its water pumps for the cost of \$65,000, this was no small feat for a small community.

Another one of the problems facing Belt, is our wastewater system, we are currently under a Consent advisory by the DEQ for our Wastewater Treatment System. We are required to install a disinfection system. We have an existing debt in our wastewater system of \$600,000 to USDA RD.

We have contracted with NCI Engineering to complete a PER. We applied for funding from USDA Rural Utilities Services; TSEP; RRGL and CDBG for funding for the PER we were awarded \$15,000 from TSEP \$10,000 from DNRC; a loan of \$30,000 from InterCap, we are still waiting the outcome of CDBG and USDA RUS programs; the remainder of funding is to come from local sources.

The DOC sewer utility target rate for Belt is \$19.10, our current rates are \$ 25.00 per month, we are currently above the target rates for sewer utilities.

We would hope that you would look at the almost insurmountable debt that the Town will be facing in the very near future, if we do not receive some help. We are; as most small towns are an aging community, with a LMI of 57.3%. There comes a time when you can no longer raise your rates, to meet the needs of the system upgrades that are necessary to continue to provide the community clean and affordable water that our Montana State Constitution mentions.

We have 273 households in our community, we are a fiscally conservative community without many of the frills and extras that larger communities can offer, we will continue to do the best that we can with the resources that are available, but we do need your help.

Sincerely;

John Miller
Nadine Hardinger
John T. Mital
Ellen Enderson
Jean Fontana

Sally Miller
Mike Zukoski
Robert Williams
John Brown